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AUTHOR Hoy, P. H.
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ABSTRACT

The results of a questionnaire from 16 European countries concerning the early teaching of modern languages are presented. The 16 countries involved are: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The findings indicate a European trend toward lowering the starting age for learning modern languages. A majority of countries introduce the teaching of at least one modern language at, or below, the age of 10. The main problems connected with the early teaching of modern languages are classified under the headings of "organizational," "political," "sociological," "pedagogical," and "financial." A sample questionnaire is included in the report. (SW)

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The early teaching of modern languages

A summary of reports from sixteen countries

by

Mr P H HOY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The information summarised in this paper was gathered mainly by means of a questionnaire (Appendix I) which was circulated to CCC countries. Replies were received from 16 national authorities, including 6 Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany; these replies contain a large and significant volume of information and ideas, to which this short survey does scant justice. It is hoped, however, that the present paper may be a first step towards future studies of far greater scope and depth.

In order to save space, little has been said about teaching methods, as these generally tend to follow the active, oral lines sketched in the questionnaire. The letters ETML are used as an abbreviation for "the early teaching of modern languages". Unascribed quotations come from the relevant replies to the questionnaire.

The writer offers his cordial thanks to all who answered the questionnaire, to the Director of CILT, the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, London, for advice and practical assistance, and to the Secretariat of the Directorate of Education and of Cultural and Scientific Affairs of the Council of Europe for their co-operation and encouragement.

2. INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES: RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE

BELGIUM

The bilingual situation causes great complexity and the ETML position can only receive the briefest of summaries in the present paper.

a. French-speaking areas

Dutch is taken by many children from the age of eight. The chief aim is to improve communicative competence within the national community. The basic method is to create a Dutch-speaking ambiance. Central directives on aims and methods are issued for local implementation. Dutch is usually taught by the class teacher. No statistical evaluation of results has been made. The main problem is lack of continuity between primary and secondary schools and there is some resistance to the learning of Dutch in French-speaking areas. Despite these difficulties the project is likely to continue for reasons of national needs.

b. Dutch-speaking areas

French is compulsory from the age of eight in bilingual areas and is optional elsewhere from the age of 10; it is taken in the optional areas by about 95% of the school population. The reasons for ETML are the bilingual situation, with special reference to economic and industrial needs, and also the availability of audio-visual materials. Central directives are issued, but teachers have a free choice among commercially produced materials. Oral methods are widely used and there is differentiation of treatment for children of varying abilities. Migrant children have intensive language courses, often outside school hours. The project, which is of long standing, is regarded as successful and is to be continued.

DENMARK

English is compulsory for all children for five years from the age of ten. The aim is to improve communicative competence and intellectual development, whilst encouraging healthy international attitudes. Central regulations are locally administered. Materials are chosen by the teacher from a considerable variety, often published in other countries. There is some integration of the English course with art and music. Continuity is ensured by the comprehensive school system in which children are kept together from seven to sixteen. The main problem is that of "individualising" the teaching. The teaching of English to this age-group is considered successful and is to be continued.

FINLAND

ETML has been introduced under the influence of international trends of pedagogical opinion and the national requirements of commerce and industry. Finnish cannot be used for international contacts and its unusual character means that for Finnish children "... learning a foreign language is a long process that should start as early as possible". All children learn a second or foreign language from the age of nine. English is taught to 90% of these children, Swedish to 3% and Finnish to 7% (ie to those whose mother tongue is Swedish). Very small numbers take Russian, German or French at primary level. Policy is centrally defined but locally implemented, with considerable freedom for teachers in the choice of methods and materials. Continuity between the primary and secondary stages is ensured through coherence of curriculum and textbook sequence. There is some integration between ETML and history, geography and the mother tongue. Teachers - who are in short supply - may be specialists or class teachers. Suitable in-service courses are provided. Problems include an initial shortage of materials and books, and the difficulty of providing time for ETML without unduly lengthening the school day. ETML "... is generally regarded as a very important reform and it is likely to continue".

FRANCE

ETML began in the mid-fifties and spread widely, mainly through local initiative, with periodical surveys by the central authorities. In 1973, however, a ministerial circular prohibited the initiation of new projects in ETML, and limited activities, until further notice, to "vertical" developments which would ensure continuity in the progress of on-going experiments. Nevertheless, a map of the areas in which ETML exists covers most of France, with the heaviest concentrations along the eastern frontier with Germany, to the west of Paris, and in the Bordeaux region. The Institut national de Recherches et de Documentation pédagogiques is evaluating a limited, controlled experiment.

The total figures for 1973-74 were that 46,000 children aged up to ten were learning English and 40,000 German, representing in all 1.6% of the primary school population. Small numbers of primary children learn Italian, Spanish, Provençal and Esperanto. The Franco-German Cultural Treaty, mentioned elsewhere in this paper, involves the exchange of French and German nursery school teachers for ETML at pre-primary level. Motivation for the spread of ETML has been varied, originating in the hypothesis that young children learn languages easily and proceeding more recently to the idea that time is more readily available at the primary than at the secondary stage.

Most of the above information comes from:

GIRARD: Enseignement précoce des langues vivantes, Ministère de l'Education Nationale, 1974.

This is a detailed and comprehensive report, kindly made available to the present writer by the French Inspectorate General. Monsieur Girard considers that standards in ETML vary greatly between regions and he concludes that an adequately planned anf financed experiment is needed as a basis for national policy. He reacts respectfully to Burstall but considers that a similar experiment with somewhat different parameters would lead to very different conclusions in France. He estimates the cost of existing experiments as £1 million in France and £3 million in England. The report of the French delegation to the Wiesbaden Symposium and the Girard report both emphasise that ETML will rarely if ever produce true bilingualism without external influences. Both sources stress the value of the bilateral Franco-German co-operation mentioned above.

The French interest in ETML has had great influence in Europe, not least through the popularity of audio-visual materials produced in France.

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

The eleven Länder act independently in ETML as in all educational matters. In 1972 a central enquiry established that nine Länder were experimenting with ETML, mainly in English but also in French. The six Länder which responded to the present questionnaire provided valuable information which is summarised below.

BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG

ETML was introduced to provide equality of opportunity and in accordance with the hypothesis that young children learn languages easily. European opinion also exerted considerable influence. It was hoped, too, that ETML would lead towards more informal relations between teachers and children. At present 5% of children in grades 3 and 4 (ages 8-10) learn English and 1% French. There are central directives, with local implementation and assessment. Recommended books and materials are supplemented by the teachers themselves, who may be class teachers or specialists. Local centres provide advice, in-service courses and assistance with continuity. Often, however, continuity between stages depends on individual co-operation between teachers, as sequential primary-secondary materials are not available. Class-time for ETML is provided by adding to the length of the normal school day. There is a risk that over-ambitious parents who regard languages as "prestige" subjects may sometimes cause children to be overtaxed. Difficulties of finance and teacher supply have been experienced. Teacher shortage would prevent immediate expansion of ETML but in any case final conclusions as to the success of the experiment have not yet been reached.

BERLIN

Modern languages have been taught in Berlin "Grundschulen" (ages 6-12) since 1948 for reasons of international communication and general education. All children, except the mentally handicapped, learn a foreign language in classes 5 and 6 of the Grundschule. 95.6% learn English, 1% French and 3% Latin. In an experiment involving 28 classes English is taught from the 3rd grade (age 9) onwards. Migrant children learn German and one foreign language. Central directives are locally administered, with the help of specialist advisers. Tests for the central assessment of achievement are in preparation. Teachers are usually specialists, but as there is a shortage of these, in-service courses are provided for general class teachers. Research activities are directed towards the improvement of efficiency rather than towards assessing the value of ETML.

Providing class time has created no problems. Continuity is ensured through the general school system, through sequential materials spanning primary and secondary stages and through teacher conferences. Some integration with other subjects has been achieved through co-operation between individual teachers. Children who find difficulty with L2 are usually those who are less literate in L1; with them the emphasis is placed on oral work. The present system is to be continued and the starting age for L2 may be lowered in a few years' time.

HESSE

ETML is practised to improve international understanding and communicative competence on the hypothesis that young children learn foreign languages easily. English is taken by 7% of grades 3 and 4 (ages 8-10); these include migrant children, with whom the subject is popular because it places them on equal terms with children of the host country. The project is experimental, centrally inspired and locally administered. Advisory teachers and co-ordinators play an important role; the latters' responsibilities include the encouragement of continuity between primary and secondary schools. Teachers have special qualifications in English but usually teach other subjects in addition. "It is too great a strain on a teacher if he specialises only in English at primary level because of the predominance of oral instruction." The existing project is adequately staffed but expansion would depend on the training of more teachers. In-service courses are provided. Schools are free to choose their teaching materials; oral work and individualisation are stressed but integration with other subjects is not advised. Time for English is taken from other subjects at the discretion of individual schools. The main problems are the provision of adequate finance for large-scale teacher-training and the ensuring of continuity. The experiment is regarded as successful and the authorities mention in particular that, given appropriate teaching methods, "... children from underprivileged socio-economic groups benefit greatly from taking part in foreign language instruction". There is likely to be steady expansion of ETML in Hesse. A detailed account of ETML in this and other Länder is included in the book:

Dr. Gundi Gompf: ENGLISCHUNTERRICHT AUF DER PRIMARSTUFE (Beltz, Weinheim, 1975)

LOWER SAXONY

English is taught to 5% of the children in grades 3 and 4 (ages 8-10) in four experimental schemes which began in autumn 1972 and are regionally organised. The aim is to determine whether this addition of two years to the usual

English course will lead to higher achievement at the secondary stage. The "early beginners" are tested annually against control groups. There are centrally produced tests, together with questionnaires for teachers and pupils. Evaluation is by experts. The experiment has not yet led to definite conclusions but preliminary results have been published in:

Schulversuche und Schulreform, Band 8,
ENGLISCH IM PRIMARBEREICH,
Schroedel, Hannover, 1975

Teaching is by specialists in English, who are usually the class teachers. Staffing resources are adequate for the present experiment but not for expansion. Half of the lesson time for English is taken from other subjects and half is added to the normal timetable. Materials are centrally prescribed; audio-visual aids are in general use; measures to ensure continuity include publications, conferences and school visits. The main problems have been organisational and the experiment is to continue.

NORDRHEIN-WESTFALEN

This Land sponsors two pilot schemes, one in French and one in English, with the common aims of improving communicative competence in L1 and L2 and in encouraging international understanding.

The French project is linked with the Franco-German Cultural Agreement under which, among other co-operative schemes, a number of French nursery school teachers work for one or two years in German nursery schools, and vice versa. In Nordrhein-Westfalen French is taken by 1,380 children (1% of the Grundschule population) in addition to the pre-primary scheme. The central authorities are responsible for teacher supply and general arrangements including the organisation of courses and conferences. Instruction is mainly by native speakers, together with a number of German teachers specialising in French. A "natural method" of language teaching is recommended and the general aim is for children to be able to use simple French in everyday situations. At primary level the courses BONJOUR LINE and FRERE JACQUES are widely used. There have been some difficulties in continuity of staffing and in the supply of materials. Co-operation in assessment is provided by the University of Cologne. The English project involves 4,250 children in grades 3 and 4 (ages 8-10), representing 4% of the Grundschule population and situated in 35 schools in seven areas. As with French, all levels of intelligence are included. Continuity between primary and secondary stages is a condition for area participation. Central directives set out clear linguistic aims, mainly in structural terms.

Materials are recommended but not prescribed and much is left to the teacher's initiative. Methods usually follow oral lines. Most teachers hold specialist qualifications, which may be supplemented by in-service training. Lesson times are usually added to the normal school day. The main problem has been to ensure vertical continuity. The children's achievement is assessed by teachers and the experiment as a whole is being assessed with the help of the Ruhr College of Education, Dortmund Division.

The two experiments are regarded as encouraging, if not decisive as yet; they are likely to continue, but without expansion at present.

RHEINLAND-PFALZ

French is taught to 4,000 children under ten years of age from the nursery school to grade 4. They represent between 1.5% and 3% of each year-group and form a cross-section of intelligence levels and of the main social classes. The schools are selected centrally to take part in the project and all children participate except migrants who, at the primary stage, usually take their native language as L1 and German as L2, adding another language as L3 at the secondary stage.

The project is motivated by the Franco-German Cultural Agreement, the proximity of the French frontier and the Rhineland-Burgundy link. Lesson time is provided by adding additional periods to the normal timetable. Initial teaching is by native speakers, often exchange teachers, with German specialists in French after the children's first two years. A teacher of French origin has produced an account of her teaching experiences, available in duplicated form for the guidance of teachers:

Simone BRETZER: FRANZÖSISCHUNTERRICHT AN DER GRUNDSCHULE BAD BERGZABERN

Further expansion would cause teacher shortages, but is not envisaged at present. The project is, however, regarded as educationally successful and is to be continued.

The foregoing accounts, inevitably condensed, show that the Federal Republic of Germany is very active in the field of ETML. Two main trends appear:

i. the Franco-German nursery school scheme, with native speakers and "natural" methods;

ii. English projects from the age of eight, largely in the form of experiments.

GREECE

No foreign languages are taught to pupils of under twelve years of age in the public educational system. English is taught to younger children in some private schools.

ICELAND

School attendance is from 6 to 16, with no formal demarcation between the primary and secondary stages. The starting age for Danish, taught as a means of contact with other Scandinavian

countries, has recently been lowered from 12 to 10. This measure has created a shortage of specialist teachers, partly filled by class teachers who have taken in-service courses. The other main problem has been the overloading of the timetable, especially for younger children, as Danish is compulsory for all. Otherwise the teaching of Danish to the lower age-group, based on oral methods, is successful and is likely to continue.

IRELAND

Here ETML is applied to an unusual situation. English is the home language of 97% of the community, Irish of 3%, but the nation "... is committed to preserving what was once our mother tongue, for national and cultural reasons". Both languages are compulsory in Irish primary schools, except for the mentally handicapped. Thus 97% of primary children learn Irish as L2 and 3% learn English as L2. French is sometimes an extra-curricular activity in primary schools. Irish is taught by up-to-date oral and audio-visual methods. The central organisation of this work includes the issuing of directives and the production and recommendation of materials, from which teachers are free to choose. A prominent technique is "creative conversation" and Irish, taught by the class teacher, is used as a medium of communication throughout the day. Problems include a shortage of teachers; a shortage of readers and subject textbooks in the Irish language; and some difficulties in using Irish as a medium of instruction. Achievement is higher in Western Ireland, where Irish tends to be the first language; motivation diminishes from West to East The system is regarded as generally successful and is to continue.

LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg has particularly strong national reasons for ETML, on historical geographical, economic and international grounds. This situation of intense societal motivation is reflected in the large numbers, virtually 100%, of primary school children who learn a foreign language. The language of the pre-primary school is Luxembourgeois. The official language of the primary school is however German, and all children learn German from the age of 6, ie on entry to the primary school. All children also learn French from the middle of the second primary school year, ie from the age of about 7 1/2. Migrant children, whose native languages are usually of Romance origin, find French especially useful.

Methods in the primary school are oral and structural, with audio-visual aids but no support from radio or television. Syllabuses and materials are centrally organised but may be liberally and imaginatively interpreted by teachers. At the primary state, French is taught by class teachers, all of whom have received courses for this purpose at their college of education. French is officially tested before a child's entry to the secondary phase.

Such problems as exist are sociological and pedagogical, but there is no evidence of variation in achievement in primary school French by sex or socio-economic class. ETML is regarded as an incontrovertible necessity and discussion is not concerned with whether it should continue, but rather with the optimum starting age.

MALTA

The teaching of English to all primary school children is a long-established practice for economic and cultural reasons. The mother tongue, Maltese, has little currency as a medium for international communication. English studies are centrally organised, with advisory services for teachers and the provision of standardised tests for older pupils. English is taught by the general class

teachers. Methods include the use of audio-visual aids and radio broadcasts and they lead to a variety of written work. No notable problems are encountered and the present system is likely to continue.

NETHERLANDS

The teaching of a foreign language in primary schools is forbidden by law unless it takes place outside the normal timetable; this occurs, however, in some 10% of primary schools, which cover the age-range 6-12. After the age of 12 the learning of at least one foreign language (usually English or German) is compulsory for almost all pupils.

An official experiment in the learning of English by children aged 10-12 within school hours is in progress, organised by the University of Utrecht. The motivation is cultural and educational, audio-visual methods are used, and the language is taught by class teachers. An experiment with German for younger children is in progress at Enschede. The results of these projects are awaited, and in the near future there may be an official decision on the compulsory introduction of a foreign language into all primary schools. The implementation of such a measure would however be delayed for some years by problems of teacher-supply. Special and very successful measures are taken to teach Dutch to the children of migrant workers and linguistic minorities.

NORWAY

English, as a world language, is taught to all children aged 10 and above. Ten is regarded as a favourable age for language-learning. Through local initiatives, English is started by some 1,200 children at the age of nine. The Lapp minority learn Norwegian as a second language from the age of seven, adding English at ten.

Continuity in the main scheme is ensured through the overall schools system, reinforced by sequential materials. Organisation is central, with considerable local freedom in the choice of methods and materials, which follow up-to-date lines. English is usually taught by the class teacher, with advice and co-operation from specialist colleagues, and with occasional opportunities for in-service training. Some integration with other subjects takes place.

The chief problems encountered are (a) the need for more varied teaching materials, produced to match the needs of Norwegian children, and (b) the provision and distribution of teaching time. Teachers are at liberty to make experiments, but a national lowering of the starting age for English is not envisaged, although the existing project is regarded as successful.

SWEDEN

Since 1972 English has been compulsory for all children from the age of nine. Knowledge of English as a world language is regarded as a national and an individual necessity. The choice of nine as the starting age was considerably influenced by international opinion, especially as expressed in Council of Europe symposia. Children of migrant workers are included in the scheme; thus a migrant child aged ten will have tuition in the mother tongue, in Swedish and in English.

Aims, activities and time-allocation are prescribed by the Education Act. Teaching is organised locally in accordance with a centrally devised syllabus which is based on widely accepted methods and includes a strong recommendation for individual and group work. Teaching materials, commercially produced in Sweden, are recommended but not prescribed. The class teacher is responsible for English for at least a year. Integration with other subjects is widespread. Research projects are in progress and in-service training has been reinforced by radio and television broadcasts. No insurmountable problems in ETML have arisen and the scheme is considered successful. It is to continue, but if a still earlier start were made, special measures in teacher-training would become necessary.

SWITZERLAND

A complex situation is caused by the highly decentralised educational system and by the existence of four national languages (German, French, Italian and Romansh). The Conference of Cantonal Directors of Education (Conférence des Directeurs cantonaux de l'instruction publique) has instituted a committee of experts on language teaching, the duties of which include the co-ordination and furtherance of cantonal projects for the introduction of second or foreign languages at primary level.

In German-speaking Switzerland some cantons have introduced French into primary schools on an experimental basis for 10% of the children. Others have introduced it permanently for between 60% and 100% of the primary school population. The French-speaking sections of the same cantons have introduced similar measures for German. The whole ability-range is included and starting ages vary between 6 and 11. Children in linguistic minorities (Italian, Romansh) may take three languages at the primary stage, eg L1, German and French. French is usually taught by the class teachers, for whom in-service courses are available. Continuity between the primary and secondary stages is attempted through area organisation and sequential materials. Lesson time is obtained partly by subtraction from other subjects, partly by additions to the normal school timetable.

The aims of the project are to extend the teaching of L2 across the whole ability-range, and to co-ordinate the age at which the L2 is introduced. Motivation has arisen from international trends of opinion and from the hypothesis that younger children learn languages more easily than at a later stage. Problems have been financial, curricular (loss of time by other subjects) and attitudinal (negative reactions from teachers outside the scheme). The project is supported by participating teachers, both primary and secondary. Geographically, motivation is highest near the linguistic frontier and decreases from West to East. The committee of experts, which is formulating improved strategies for the future, regards the totality of cantonal projects as generally successful and forecasts their expansion.

In the Italian-speaking canton of Tessin special arrangements are made for the teaching of French in primary schools.

In French-speaking Switzerland the aims and methods of introducing German as the second or foreign language are similar to the procedures described above, but the additional hope is expressed that the early teaching of a modern language may facilitate the introduction of a third language at the age of 11 or 12 and a Swiss-German dialect at a later stage. In 1974-75 about 10% of the French-speaking primary school population were learning German; some migrant children are to be provided with opportunities for learning French. German is usually taught by class teachers, for whom in-service courses are available, including a one-month course at the Goethe Institute in Munich. Organisation of the various primary German projects is the responsibility of individual cantons, but the evaluation of the scheme as a whole is in the hands of the Institut Romand de Recherches et de Documentation pédagogiques at Neuchâtel. Results cannot be formulated as yet, since the experiment is still at an early stage.

TURKEY

In the national school system the teaching of a foreign language does not begin until a child enters the secondary school at the age of 11-12.

UNITED KINGDOM

In most parts of the United Kingdom the local education authorities are reconsidering their policy concerning ETML as a result of the NFER report on the experimental scheme for the teaching of French which is outlined under the section on "England"; this section was lengthened for that reason.

ENGLAND

A national experiment on the teaching of French in primary schools in England and Wales took place from 1963 to 1973. The final evaluation by the National Foundation for Educational Research was published in September 1974 in the volume:

Clare BURSTALL (and colleagues): PRIMARY FRENCH IN THE BALANCE, National Foundation for Educational Research, Slough, 1974

The main purpose of the experiment was to examine the desirability of introducing a foreign language to children at the age of 8 instead of 11. Three "cohorts" (year-groups) of primary school children began French at the age of eight in 1964, 1965 and 1968 respectively. Each cohort contained about 6,000 children and represented a cross-section of the primary school population in ability, in socio-economic status and in geographical location. The first and third cohorts were followed through from the age of 8 to 13 plus, and the second from 8 to 16 plus. The investigation was concerned with the collection and evaluation of data relating to the experimental pupils' level of achievement in French and their attitudes towards learning the language. Control groups were established and the process of evaluation included tests of achievement and measures of pupils' and teachers' attitudes.

Class teachers undertook most of the teaching, although sometimes to more than one class; in-service training (linguistic and methodological) included opportunities for courses in France; materials were locally selected from four or five possibilities, most schools, however, using EN AVANT, an audio-visual and textbook course specially written for the experiment; continuity between primary and secondary stages was arranged in a variety of ways.

Although earlier impressions had been more optimistic, the final conclusion of the 1974 report was to advise against further expansion of the teaching of French in primary schools. The main reasons were as follows:

a. the experiment gave no indication of the optimum age for learning a foreign language. If anything, older children might be more efficient than younger children at acquiring language skills;

b. initial failure leads to negative attitudes. Many of the experimental children developed hostile attitudes towards the learning of a foreign language.

Other important points in this report (which is rich in information and ideas) are:

i. the close correlation between higher socio-economic status and the children's success in learning French;

ii. the urgent necessity for a redefinition of objectives to meet children's varying abilities and needs;

iii. the conclusion that the effects of primary school French on the rest of the curriculum were neither harmful nor beneficial.

Primary school French had expanded to an estimated 30% of children aged 8 to 11 by the early seventies, largely through public pressure, so that the astringent, if not pessimistic, conclusions of the report came as a shock to many people, and vigorous discussion has ensued. Future developments are difficult to forecast. Local education authorities in whose areas primary school French has proved successful may well continue with it, especially as middle schools (ages usually 8-12 or 9-13) become more frequent. Other authorities may cease ETML, perhaps compensating with additional courses at secondary level. British membership of the EEC may exert an effect.

SCOTLAND

The overall situation is not dissimilar to that in England except that systematic evaluation has been limited to small areas. Some successes and many problems have been identified, including teacher-shortage and difficulties with continuity. Nevertheless some 5% of primary school children still learn French (or, in a few schools, German) and the work is likely to continue. A closed-circuit television project in Glasgow deserves mention. In certain areas, too, Gaelic is taught as a second language in primary schools.

WALES

Wales has a bilingual situation in which Welsh and English have long been taught as second languages in the relevant areas, which cover most parts of the country. This work is characterised by vigorous teaching and an attractive range of materials and methods which have interreacted, to mutual advantage, with the courses used in the French experiment described above.

The demands of the bilingual situation leave little opportunity for the early teaching of French, which is limited to about 2% of the primary school population. Where French is introduced at this stage it is through local initiative; results are variable but the activity is likely to continue.

NORTHERN IRELAND

4% of primary school children learn Irish as a second language, and this has special significance for families who use Irish in their homes. 2% learn French. In each case class teachers are responsible for the ETML; commercially produced audio-visual courses are in use and few problems are encountered. Official policy, outlined in PRIMARY EDUCATION: A TEACHERS' GUIDE is to encourage the early teaching of both languages and the work is likely to continue.

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 The foregoing reports indicate that there is a European trend towards lowering the starting age for modern languages. This tendency is in accordance with the main recommendation of the Wiesbaden Symposium, "...that the start of early language teaching should be brought forward ..." (CCC/EGT (74) 10 p.20). A majority of countries introduce the teaching of at least one modern language at, or, below the age of 10. Some countries envisage further expansion of this activity.

3.2 The more philosophical reasons for ETML are in harmony with Resolution (69) 2, adopted by the Ministers' Deputies on 25 January 1969 (Appendix II). The sharper effects of immediate practical needs, however, divide countries into two groups:

a. countries with an urgent need to promote the learning of foreign languages:

i. some of these countries may have languages of small circulation and therefore wish to equip as many children as possible with practical competence in a major European language, finding the necessary time more easily in the primary than in the secondary school.

ii. other countries in this category have a multilingual situation and therefore possess strong societal motives for enabling the maximum number of their own citizens to understand one another. Within this category a special kind of bilingualism is that in which the language, dialect or patois spoken at home differs from the officially accepted language spoken in the school. The children of migrant workers are frequently in this situation.

b. countries such as France and England whose languages have world-wide currency and who at the same time are relatively free from bilingual or multilingual problems.

Countries in group (a) usually take broad, centralised decisions to introduce ETML widely, even nationally, for practical as well as for educational reasons. They do not neglect experimentation and research (cf. Sweden), but these are generally directed towards improving efficiency rather than towards the determination of policy.

Countries of group (b) are not indifferent to ETML but, apart from relatively minor problems of multilingualism, their interest in ETML is theoretical rather than practical. They tend to experiment over long periods of time, to produce attractive teaching materials (since incentives for the children must be pedagogical rather than instrumental) and to restrict ETML to a minority of primary school children, not necessarily, however, selected according to ability.

3.3 Some features of ETML appear to be common to most of the member countries in which it is practised:-

3.3.1 The foreign language is usually taught to children representing the whole range of ability, apart from the mentally handicapped.

3.3.2 Classes are usually of mixed ability, but lessons often include group or individual work.

3.3.3 Pedagogical ideas, teaching methods, materials and equipment are very similar in most countries; this is very largely due to the influence of Council of Europe symposia, and to such organisations as CREDIF, BELC, the NUFFIELD/SCHOOLS COUNCIL MODERN LANGUAGES PROJECT and other official or semi-official bodies.

3.3.4 Teachers are nearly always free to choose the materials and pedagogical approaches which they prefer, except when accurate experimentation demands a measure of consistency and harmonisation of methods throughout a sample of schools.

3.4 The main problems connected with ETML may be classified under five headings:

3.4.1 Organisational

To what extent is a national policy or consensus made necessary by the need for continuity and by the geographical mobility of families?

How can local initiatives be nationally co-ordinated?

How can time for ETML be found without prejudice to other parts of the primary curriculum? Can a solution be found to some extent in the integration of ETML with other subjects?

3.4.2 Political

Certain languages are selected for ETML for historical or political reasons which may react adversely on motivation; on the other hand the early teaching of a locally unpopular language may be a deliberate and effective means of counteracting prejudice against that language and its speakers.

3.4.3 Sociological

Children who are "linguistically deprived" in regard to L_1 may often experience difficulty in learning L_2. On the other hand the early learning of a foreign language may have a compensatory and democratising effect, as in Luxembourg and in the Strasbourg area of France. Young migrant children often enjoy learning a foreign language as a means of achieving success in a subject in which they are on relatively equal terms with children of the host country.

While wise parental support is an asset to the learning of a foreign language, over-ambitious or over-anxious parents have been known to cause stress and overwork in attempting to spur young children towards unreasonably high standards of achievement in language-learning.

3.4.4 Pedagogical

Some countries consider that ETML is too formal to be harmonised with the rest of the primary curriculum. Others find that foreign language-learning introduces a welcome element of informality into the primary classroom. Teaching methods and materials are considered by most countries to require further study and development, especially in regard to group-work, individualisation, integration, the "exploitation" phase and the use of music, mime and movement. Some countries express dissatisfaction with the range of materials available.

3.4.5 Financial

This is frequently quoted as a limiting factor in regard to the expansion of ETML, especially in the field of teacher-training.

A P P E N D I X I

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
DIVISION FOR GENERAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

"MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN PRIMARY EDUCATION"

1. Kindly send the replies to the following questionnaire by 5 July 1975 to:

Mr P H Hoy
"Brambles"
Wood Way
Farnborough Park
Orpington, Kent BR6 8LS
England

It would be greatly appreciated if your replies were numbered in accordance with the questionnaire, eg 1, 5 (a), 3, 4, etc.

2. The age-range covered by "primary" education varies from country to country. This questionnaire takes the age of ten as a general dividing line between primary and secondary education, but it is assumed that this division will be interpreted according to the current practice of each country.

3. It will be of great value if the replies to the questionnaire are accompanied by references to sources of information. Bibliographies and copies of documentation such as existing reports would also be welcomed.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. GENERAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE EARLY TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

1.1 Is a foreign language taught to a substantial number of children below 10 years of age in the public educational system of your country? If so, is such teaching organised on a national, regional or local scale?

1.2 What are the main reasons for the inclusion (or otherwise) of a foreign language in the curriculum of primary schools in your country?

1.3 Please indicate the percentage of children below the age of 10 who are learning a foreign language in your country. Please name the language or languages. If more than one foreign language is taught at primary level please indicate the percentage of children learning each language.

1.4 Is a foreign language taught to children of all levels of intelligence at the primary stage? Are all socio-economic groups equally involved in this activity, or are any social groups more particularly involved?

1.5 How is continuity ensured:

a. between the pre-primary and primary stages, and

b. between the primary and secondary stages?

1.6 Does the early teaching of a foreign language have a special application to the children of migrant workers or of parents belonging to any other linguistic minorities in your country? Three examples of such special application might be:

a. the reinforcement of the migrant child's native language (L1);

b. the teaching of the language of the host country (L2);

c. the teaching of a third language (L3) as taught to indigenous children of the host country.

In Germany, for example, L1 might be Spanish, L2 would be German and L3 might be French or English.

2. THE ORGANISATION OF THE EARLY TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

2.1 Is the early teaching of foreign languages organised centrally or locally? Are schools visited for such purposes as advice, supervision or assessment?

2.2 Please give a brief description or send copies of official recommendations or directives which have been produced for the guidance of teachers and organisers.

2.3 Are teaching and testing materials centrally prescribed?

2.4 Is there a centrally organised assessment of the children's progress in learning the foreign language? If so, what form does it take? If there is no central assessment, is progress assessed locally, eg by the teachers?

2.5 What methods and criteria are used in assessing the general value of the early teaching of foreign languages?

3. THE TEACHERS

3.1 Are foreign languages taught in primary schools by specialist teachers of these languages or by the general class teachers who are responsible for most of the other subjects of the primary school curriculum?

3.2 What are the reasons for this situation?

3.3 Do non-specialist teachers receive additional training to enable them to deal with foreign languages? Please indicate the nature, length and frequency of any supplementary courses designed to help serving teachers in this way.

3.4 Does the initial training of primary school teachers include preparation for the teaching of foreign languages? If so, please give a brief description of such courses, which may be linguistic or methodological.

3.5 Are there enough teachers to deal adequately with the present number of primary classes in which a foreign language is taught? Are there enough teachers to allow for further expansion of this activity? If there is a shortage of teachers for either purpose, what measures are envisaged to provide more teachers?

4. WORK IN THE CLASSROOM

4.1 Are classes graded according to ability?

4.2 Have the aims of the course been expressed

a. in terms of language skills?

b. in terms of linguistic material (vocabulary, structures) to be taught?

4.3 What books and other teaching materials are in use? Are any of these centrally produced?

4.4 What teaching equipment is in general use? Examples would be:

a. tape-recorders;

b. filmstrip projectors;

c. flannelgraphs.

4.5 Have there been any problems in the provision of sufficient books, material and equipment?

4.6 What teaching methods are in general use, eg:

a. oral methods?

b. the use of songs, rhymes and jingles?

c. role-playing?

d. structure-drills?

e. the use of audio-visual aids including radio, television and films?

4.7 Have there been problems or difficulties in providing for the teaching of foreign languages within the timetables of primary schools?

4.8 Has it proved possible to integrate the learning of foreign languages with other subjects of the primary curriculum, eg through links with history, geography, art or music?

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 What factors have contributed to the development of the early teaching of modern languages? Examples might be:

a. motivation through vocational considerations;

b. the influence of travel and tourism;

c. international influences, eg via the Council of Europe.

5.2 What kinds of problems have arisen? These might for example have been educational, sociological, psychological, financial or logistic.

5.3 Are there marked differences in achievement between different categories of children, eg between boys and girls, between children living in different regions, or between children originating from different socio-economic groups? Any references to research reports or other published information would be especially useful in this connection.

5.4 Is the teaching of a foreign language to young children generally regarded as educationally and administratively successful? Is it likely to continue in your country?

A P P E N D I X II

Council of Europe

Committee of Ministers

RESOLUTION (69) 2

(Adopted by the Ministers' Deputies on 25 January 1969)

ON AN INTENSIFIED MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAMME FOR EUROPE

(excerpts concerning, in particular, the early teaching of modern languages)

The Committee of Ministers,

Considering the Recommendation No. 40 (1968) of the Council for Cultural Co-operation concerning the teaching of modern languages;

Considering Recommendation 535 of the Consultative Assembly

Having regard to the place given to modern languages in the European Cultural Convention; ...

Believing: ...

- that linguistic diversity is part of the European cultural heritage and that it should, through the study of modern languages, provide a source of intellectual enrichment rather than be an obstacle to unity;

- that a better knowledge of modern European languages will lead to the strengthening of links and the increase in international exchanges on which economic and social progress in Europe increasingly depends;

- that a knowledge of a modern language should no longer be regarded as a luxury reserved for an élite, but an instrument of information and culture which should be available to all,

Expresses its satisfaction at the progress made since the "Major Project Modern Languages" was initiated;

Recommends to the governments of member states that an intensified programme be undertaken as follows:

1. In primary and secondary schools:

- Introduction, to the maximum extent possible in existing national circumstances, of the teaching of at least one widely spoken European language to pupils from the age of about ten, with a view to extending such teaching as soon as possible to all boys and girls from about this age;

- Preparation of modern teaching materials for use in language courses making full and systematic use of audio-visual means;

- Development of language courses, making systematic use of television, radio and other audio-visual media in combination with modern study materials;

- Installation of special facilities for modern languages teaching, including well-stocked libraries and equipment enabling schools to take advantage of suitable radio and television programmes etc;

- Revision of methods of assessment (texts, examinations ...) to give due prominence to auditory and oral skills;

- Systematic experimentation into the feasibility of introducing at least one widely spoken foreign language into the curriculum of all European school children at the earliest possible stage before the age of ten.